A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Help a Hurting Heart

National Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Month — October 2010
Recorded: October 12, 2010; posted: October 14, 2010

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

For most medical conditions, early detection and a quick response are important for a positive outcome. That's especially true with a sudden cardiac arrest, during which the heart abruptly stops beating effectively, resulting in loss of blood flow to the brain and other vital organs.

Dr. Amy Valderrama is a researcher with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. She's joining us today to discuss how to help someone who is having a sudden cardiac arrest. Welcome to the show, Amy.

[Dr. Valderrama] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, how common are cardiac arrests?

[Dr. Valderrama] Well we estimate that there are about 300,000 cardiac arrests each year in the United States and that's more than 800 each day. Cardiac arrest is different from a heart attack. You may not have any symptoms before the cardiac arrest and heart attacks are a loss of blood flow to an area of the heart, which we consider a plumbing problem; cardiac arrests are more of an electrical problem.

[Dr. Gaynes] What is the survival rate for cardiac arrests?

[Dr. Valderrama] Well, chances of survival are very poor, with less than eight percent of people surviving a cardiac arrest. This number varies a lot across the United States, with some areas having higher survival rates than others.

[Dr. Gaynes] As a bystander, how would one know that a person is having a cardiac arrest?

[Dr. Valderrama] Well, if you approach a person who's collapsed and you're wondering if they've had a cardiac arrest, if you tap their shoulder, lightly shake them, say their name and they're unresponsive and they're not breathing, those would be clues that they might be having a cardiac arrest. You can learn more about recognizing these signs if you become trained in CPR and those CPR classes will go into this in much more detail.

[Dr. Gaynes] What steps should a person take to help someone who might be having a cardiac arrest?

[Dr. Valderrama] Well, a person can follow what we call the steps in the chain of survival, and the chain of survival is a series of actions that have been shown to increase the chances of surviving a cardiac arrest. There are four steps in the chain of survival. The first step is to recognize the signs of the cardiac arrest and immediately call 9-1-1. This will get trained rescuers sent to your location. The second step is to start CPR quickly. CPR is most effective when it's started immediately after the victim collapses. If you don't know CPR, see if someone around you has been trained in CPR. The third step is to use an automated external defibrillator, or AED, right away, if there's one available. An AED is just a simple device that sends an electric shock to the heart to try to restore it back to its normal rhythm. They're often found in public places, like airports, schools, and office buildings. And the last step is to get advanced care to the person as quickly as possible. This is provided by highly trained emergency personnel and you can make sure that the responders know where to go when they arrive. For every minute that goes by without action the victim's chances go down significantly, so it's really important to start these steps as quickly as possible.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, where can listeners go to get more information?

[Dr. Valderrama] They can go to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/heartdisease.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Amy. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Amy Valderrama about ways to help someone who is having a cardiac arrest.

Remember: Every single minute counts in this medical emergency. Quickly taking appropriate steps can increase a person's chance of survival. These steps include calling 9-1-1, starting CPR, and using an automated external defibrillator, if available.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC.*

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.